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ARISE

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Reducing
Inequalities
in Education

National Report for Albania



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Children Are the Future

ARISE

Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education National Report for Albania

Tirana, 2021

ARISE Consortium



Centar za obrazovne politike
Centre for Education Policy



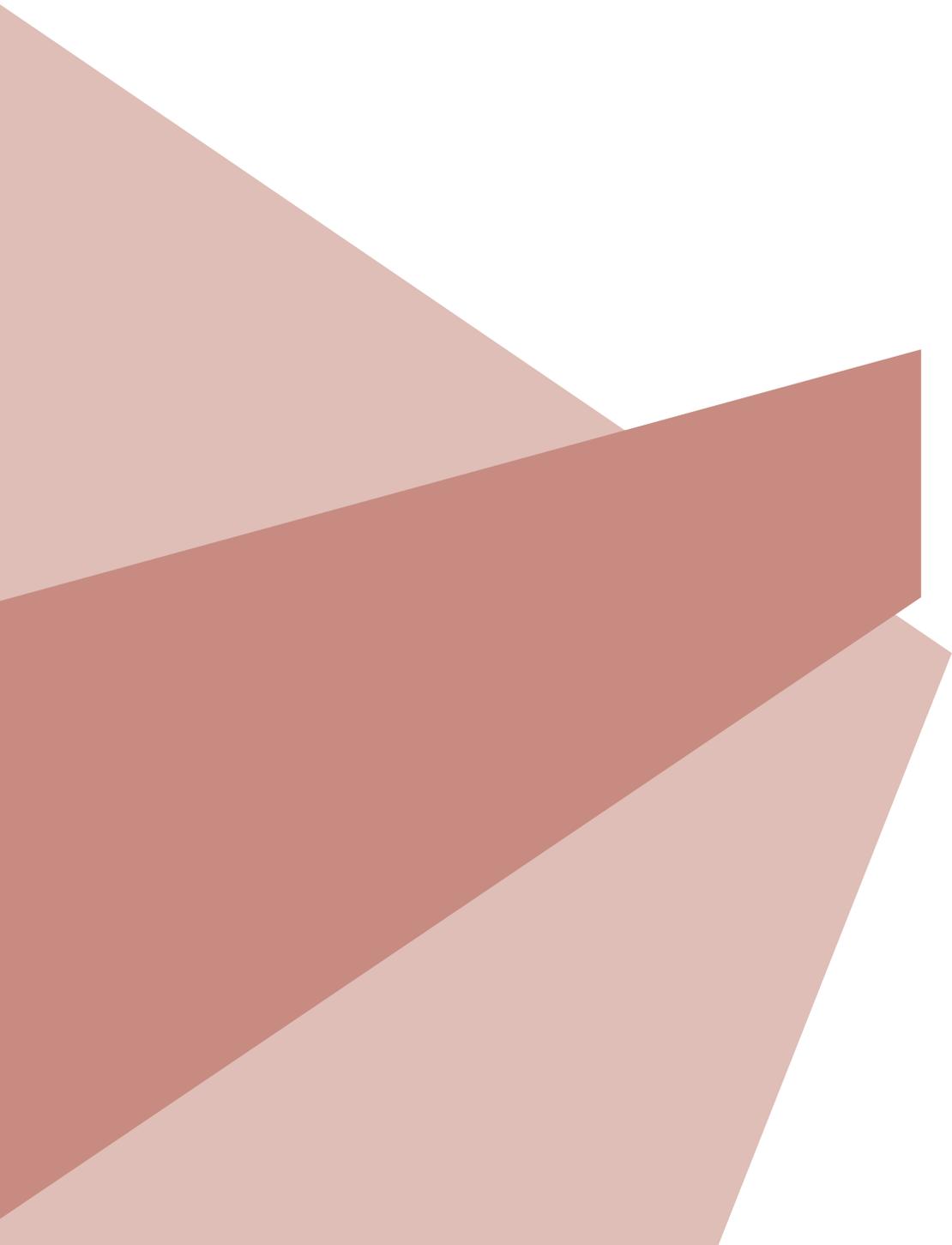
STEP BY STEP



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Introduction

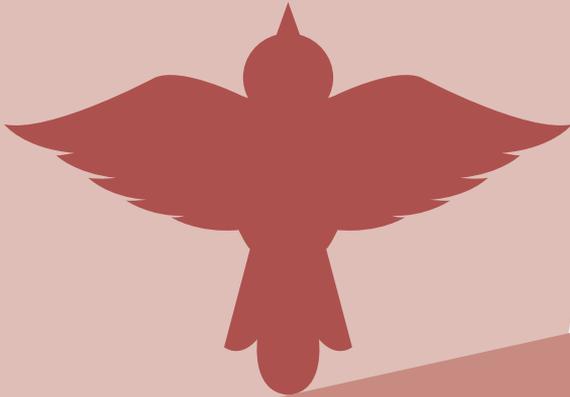
The national report was created within the project Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education (ARISE¹), a regional project implemented in Albania, Bosna and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey and funded by the European Commission. The project aims to support inclusion of students with low socio-economic status by building national and regional partnerships of civil society organisations from six aforementioned beneficiaries to engage in advocacy and constructive policy dialogue with governments, raise awareness among education stakeholders and pilot interventions targeting low SES students at the school level.

Data and information presented in the national report are collected through a policy questionnaire fulfilled after the analysis of equity-related policy documents and consultations with relevant institutions and experts and focus group and interviews with policy makers, school principals, teachers, school support staff, students, parents, civil society organisations and educational experts. Focus group and interviews are implemented to obtain stakeholders' perspective on equity-related issues in general and in the educational context of a country.



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1 More information about project: <https://www.arisenetwork.eu/en/>



1. General policy context relevant for equity

Equity in the national legislation and strategic documents

Policy analysis and information from field data collection show that the Albanian legislation and main strategic documents, such as: the Constitution of the Republic of Albania², National Strategy for Development and Integration³ (2014-2020), National Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians (2016-2020), Law 18/2017 on the Rights and Protection of Children⁴, National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020⁵, Law on Social Services, 2016, and so on, are oriented toward enhancement of inclusion and equity.

While there is no clear definition of equity, in the field of education it is mostly referred to as inclusion and equal opportunities for quality education, and it has been widely addressed as such through various national strategic documents and action plans.

More specifically, Article 57 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania guarantees the Right to Education for everyone. In addition, Article 5 of the Law on Pre-University Education System in Albania 69/2012, with amendments⁶, states that: “*The right to education in*

2 <https://www.parlament.al/Files/sKuvendi/kushtetuta.pdf>

3 National Strategy for Development and Integration 2014-2020 http://dap.gov.al/images/DokumentaStrategjik/NSDI_2015-2020.pdf

4 Law 18/2017 on the Rights and Protection of Children/Ligji nr.18/2017 për të drejtat dhe mbrojtjen e fëmijës https://www.drejtesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/04_Ligj_18_2017_23.02.2017_Per_te_drejtat_dhe_mbrojtjen_e_femijes.pdf

5 National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality (2016-2020) <https://awe-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SKGJB-EN-web.pdf>

6 <http://arsimiparauniversitar.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ligji-per-sis-temin-arsimor-parauniversitar.pdf>



the Republic of Albania is guaranteed to Albanian and foreign citizens and those without citizenship, without discrimination in terms of gender, race, colour, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs, economic or social status, age, residence, disability or other reasons defined in the Albanian legislation.”Article 6 emphasizes that *“Every student shall be ensured the right to quality education; and Students from vulnerable families, disabled students and those being in learning difficulty shall be ensured specific care”*. Whereas Article 61 stresses that a student has the right to be guaranteed quality education service based on his/her needs, interests and abilities, as well as specific support to deal with specific learning difficulties.

Furthermore, the main goal of Pre-University Education Development Strategy (PUEDS)⁷ (2014–2020) is to ensure inclusiveness and equitable access to education, while the appraisal of PUEDS (2019) stresses that the government has committed itself to improving levels of equity, equality, vulnerability and non-discriminatory access for children with disabilities and children from minority populations⁸. UNESCO as well stresses that *“Albanian legislation and key strategic national documents address inequity in several aspects, focusing mainly on issues related to income and social class inequality, the urban-rural divide, gender disparities, and discrimination against minorities (such as Roma and Balkan Egyptians), and children with disabilities”*⁹.

Moreover, describing inclusion as one of its main principles, the national Curricular Framework (2016)¹⁰ stresses the priority of offering all children the opportunity to develop their potential, regardless of their gender, socio-economic status, religion, race, ethnic group or their physical and mental abilities.

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- 7 Dokumentii Strategjisë së Zhvillimit të Arsimit Parauniversitar 2014–2020 <https://arsimi.gov.al/strategjia-e-zhvillimit-te-arsimit-parauniversitar-2014-2020/>
 - 8 UNICEF, *Appraisal of the Pre-University Education Strategy 2014-2020*, 2019, p.4 <https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2031/file/Education%20Sector%20Appraisal%20Document%20Eng.pdf>
 - 9 UNESCO, *Albania Education Policy Review: Issues and Recommendations - Extended Report*, 2017, p. 42. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf000025924>
 - 10 <https://ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Korniza-Kurrikulare.pdf>

Poverty as a source of inequity (data and research findings on poverty as cause of inequity)

While Albania has been classified by the World Bank as an upper middle-income country, poverty is still one of the main challenges that the Albanian government and related institutions have to deal with. Regarding poverty rate in Albania, according to the last count in 2012, 14.3% of Albanians lived in absolute poverty¹¹.

The Albanian State Supreme Audit (SSA)/(Kontrolli i Lartë i Shtetit) defines poverty referring to the Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Science Academy, according to which, “*absolute poverty*” is a state or condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs... and it depends not only on income but also on access to services.

In point 1.1 of its 2018 report, SSA describes “Poverty” as “... *the lack of sufficient financial means to meet the basic needs of an individual referring to the standard of living. This insufficiency deeply affects the social and cultural formation of an individual, influencing his/her overall development.*”¹²

One of the main instruments foreseen to reduce poverty in the National Strategy on Social Protection 2015-2020 is the Economic Aid Program (NE), which is allocated per household, and the maximum size of benefit is about 8,000 ALL.¹³

Despite reforms in the economic sector, education, health care and social protection during the last two decades, the government still struggles to address the needs of vulnerable groups, including children, who comprise over 35% of the population. Over 20% of children live in absolute poverty (21.4 % in rural areas), 49.6% of families

11 MAESTRAL INTERNATIONAL, *Mapping and Analysis of the Albania Child Protection System, 2015* <https://childhub.org/en/child-protection-news/child-protection-system-mapping-and-assessment-albania>

12 Kontrolli i Lartë i Shtetit (Supreme State Audit (SSA), Raport përfundimtar auditim performance, 2018, p. 7 http://www.klsh.org.al/web/raport_perfundimtar_varferia_ne_shqiperi_dhe_rol_i_shtetit_ne_zbutjen_e_saj_4446.pdf

13 End Term Review of Budget Allocations and Spending for the National Action Plan and Child Protection Policies, 2015, p. 60 https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15352/pdf/endterm_review_of_allocations_and_spending_for_npa_and_cp_policies.pdf



with more than four children are poor, and 22% of children 0-4 years old live in poverty (MAESTRAL International, 2015)¹⁴

UNESCO identifies as strategic concern regarding equity the issues related to income and social class inequality, the urban-rural divide, gender disparities, and discrimination against minorities (such as Roma and Balkan Egyptians), and children with disabilities. There are still significant barriers to Roma educational equity and inclusion, while the dropout rate in Albania is the highest among Roma and Balkan Egyptian students. (UNESCO, 2017).¹⁵ *“One in two Roma children in school age has dropped out of school”*¹⁶. Moreover the Pre-University Education Development Strategy (2014-2020) underlines that *“this phenomenon (of “drop out”) becomes even more concerning for Roma girls and children from low SES families, from remote rural areas, and for girls from areas with conservative mentality and other social problems”*¹⁷.

The literacy rate for Roma population is 65%, while at national level this percentage is 95% for Albanian population. Regarding years of schooling, Roma population has about 4.4 years of education on average, whereas for non-roma it is 9.6 years on average (UNICEF, 2017).¹⁸

Referring to other gender data, UNICEF reports that “nearly one third of Roma women are illiterate versus 5% for non-Roma women. Roma women have spent an average of only 5 years in school, compared to 10 years of schooling for non-Roma women”.¹⁹

Along with various research studies, the interviews and Focus Group discussions with school practitioners, policymakers, education experts, civil society representatives and health and social care repre-

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14 *Mapping and Analysis of the Albania Child Protection System*, MAESTRAL INTERNATIONAL, 2015 <https://childhub.org/en/child-protection-news/child-protection-system-mapping-and-assessment-albania>

15 UNESCO, *Albania: Education Policy Review*; issues and recommendations, extended report (2017) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259245>

16 The Pre-university Education Development Strategy 2014-2020, p. 15. http://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Strategji_APU_dokumenti_perfundimtar_24_03_2015-1.pdf

17 Ibid.

18 UNICEF (2017), *The Cost of Underinvestment in Education: And ways to reduce it*. P. 10. <https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/451/file/The%20Cost%20of%20Underinvestment%20in%20Education%20and%20ways%20to%20reduce%20it.pdf>

19 Ibid.



sentatives show that poverty has a very negative effect on children's education and serves as a key source of inequity. One FG civil society respondent emphasized that poverty goes parallel with inequity by creating a vicious circle from which the family and students need to make extreme efforts to break through. *“It does not simply imply lack of money, but also a denial of basic rights, such as: education, standard health care, food, clean water, shelter, and other minimum needs, which are essential for human dignity.”*

In addition, all the practitioners stressed that *“Due to the low economic level, there are children who, alongside poor physical conditions at home, lack even the most basic materials, such as: pens, pencils, notebooks, school bags, clothing, extra materials for projects and other school work”*. All of these inevitably lead to demotivation, exclusion, low achievement and even dropout. This was deepened even more during the pandemic period, as it was emphasized during the interviews and Focus Group discussions. Some children were not able to participate regularly or could not participate at all due to lack of internet and/or technological devices, in spite of several governmental and non-governmental efforts to provide smartphones or tablets.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that several positive practices of cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as school and community commitment and support were also reported by school directors and teachers during FG discussions, with a positive impact on the situation of several poor families and improvement of school attendance and higher achievement of their children. However, they remain isolated cases that need a more strategic support program and very good cross-sectorial coordination and cooperation for sustainable improvement.





2. Equity in education

International data about impact of SES on achievement (including PISA)

Even though there is no clear definition of equity in education in Albania, different stakeholders such as: school practitioners, education experts, civil society representatives in FG discussions and interviews emphasized/acknowledged that there are improvements toward access to and equity in education in terms of legal framework and policy development as well as new reform initiatives. Nevertheless, they emphasize that there are numerous challenges to be addressed, including poverty, poor home living and learning conditions, hence inability to meet all children's needs and school requirements, lack of sufficient school resources and facilities, as well as comprehensive school-based policies and teacher preparation to adequately address low SES students' needs and help them improve school attendance and achievement. Therefore, they stress that low SES status has a widely negative impact on students' achievement.

In addition to field data collection, various research studies, national and international assessments show that there is a high impact of low SES on student outcomes and achievement. More specifically, *data from PISA 2018 indicate that students from rural schools in Albania have lower mean scores than students from urban schools*. This is supported by national assessment data, which show a higher performance of students from cities than those from rural areas (OECD, 2020).²⁰

On the other hand, based on UNESCO Albania Education Policy Review 2017, PISA 2018 results and other significant documents, OECD

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²⁰ OECD, *Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, Albania, 2020*, p.18
<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/7f73878b-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/7f73878b-en>

Review document 2020²¹ provides essential data related to low SES students in Albania and their school access and outcomes. More particularly it emphasizes that the learning outcomes for Roma and Balkan Egyptian students and their enrolment remain among the lowest while dropout rates are among the highest in the country.

Additionally, it states that the school dropout rate for Roma students is about 50%. Over half of Roma children aged 6-16 have never been enrolled in school, whereas 1% and 5% respectively of Roma and Balkan Egyptian persons aged 7-20 have completed secondary education.²²

When referring to achievement outcomes, the literacy rate among Roma is 65%, 30 percentage points lower than of non-Roma, and data from Assessment of the achievement of elementary school students show that Roma students score an average of 29 out of 100 points, compared to 45 on average across Albania²³.

These findings have strongly been supported by field data collected through the interviews and Focus Group discussions, which have stressed the negative impact of low SES on students' school attendance, attainment and overall achievement.

Several efforts have been made in Albania to improve education for Roma and Egyptian children, due to which the number of Roma children in kindergarten has doubled since 2011. New policies have been developed, including *a textbook reimbursement program and efforts to promote Roma and Egyptian identities as an integral part of Albania's cultural heritage* (OECD, 2020,65),²⁴ which, in addition to other policies and project initiatives have increased their access. However, more funding and further efforts are needed in education to increase access, inclusion and outcomes for Roma and Egyptian students, students with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

21 (Maghnouj, S. et al. (2020), OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Albania, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris). https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2871/file/OECD_Reviews_of_Evaluation_and_Assessment_in_Education_Albania.pdf

22 Ibid, (Page 42)

23 UNICEF (2017), The Cost of Underinvestment in Education: And ways to reduce it. p. 10. <https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/451/file/The%20Cost%20of%20Underinvestment%20in%20Education%20and%20ways%20to%20reduce%20it.pdf>

24 Ibid, (Page 65)



Main obstacles for low SES students in pre-university education (regarding access, attainment and achievement)

In its definitions for Equity in Education, OECD sees it through two main dimensions: *fairness* and *inclusion*: “*Equity as inclusion means ensuring that all students reach at least a basic minimum level of skills*” and “*Equity as fairness implies that personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not obstacles to educational success. An equitable education system allows individuals to take full advantage of education and training irrespective of their background*”²⁵.

Research empirical and secondary data and findings show that students with low SES in Albania face numerous obstacles related to access to school, school attainment and academic achievement. UNESCO reinforces our findings through listing as strategic concerns “... *the issues related to income and social class inequality, the urban-rural divide, gender disparities, and discrimination against minorities (such as Roma and Balkan Egyptians), and children with disabilities*”²⁶.

In more details, some of the main obstacles are related to:

Poverty associated with lower learning opportunities:

“*We have very, very poor families, which, in addition to poor conditions at home, cannot afford any costs of education for their children, as, even though education is free, there are still many necessary expenses such as: school materials, food, appropriate clothing, transportation and other everyday costs, which cause dropout*”, stated a civil society respondent. This becomes even more visible in upper grades. During the pandemic period some students from these families, (whose number is not yet exactly defined) could not have proper access to education or did not have it at all, due to lack of proper technological devices, internet connection and enabling home learning conditions. “*We have done our best to identify and support poor students in our school, but the pandemic period helped us realize that the situa-*”

25 OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en> p. 15

26 UNESCO, *Albania: Education Policy Review*; issues and recommendations, extended report (2017) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259245>



tion in some cases was even worse, as some of our students dropped out of school due to the impossibility to join learning online”, stated a school director.”

Therefore, current support provided to certain groups of students, such as provision with free text books and reimbursement of transport costs, need to continue at all Pre-University education levels and be expanded to all students in need together with increased financial and material support as well as more investment in school improvement and support facilities.

Poorer teaching and learning environment in remoterural areas:

These include poor infrastructure and instructional school conditions and facilities, poor extracurricular activities, long distance to school and need for transportation coverage, lower number or lack of pre-school institutions, unmotivated and often lower number of qualified teachers compared to urban schools, hence, lower learning opportunities and learning outcomes for students from these schools, as confirmed by International tests like PISA. Reimbursement of transportation costs for a certain school distance and specific categories of vulnerable groups is regarded as a positive effort toward improving equity. However, there are still students who have to cover their transportation cost themselves. Furthermore, as stated in the National Pre-university Education Development Strategy (2016-2020), *“poor transport infrastructure does not enable concentration of schools, and provision of transport service often does not meet the students’ needs, becoming a factor for school dropout”*²⁷.

Difficult conditions or lack of access to school premises for students with disabilities due to lack of ramps and/or lifts in the school²⁸ as well as other support facilities: *“Improving the legal framework and increasing the number of assistant teachers are significant steps forward toward supporting inclusion of students with special needs/*

27 The Pre-university Education Development Strategy 2014–2020, p. 24 http://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/FLETORJA-ZYRTARE-STRATEGJIA-APU_2014_2020.pdf

28 Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, *National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities* 2016-2020, 2017, p. 32 <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/national-action-plan-persons-with-disabilities-2016-2020.html#:~:text=This%20National%20Action%20Plan%20promotes,the%20fulfilment%20of%20their%20rights.>



disabilities”, stressed a civil society representative promoting the rights and development of people with disabilities. “*However, as long as our school buildings lack necessary facilities for students, especially those with disabilities, including ramps, running water and support facilities, it’s hard to talk about equity standards*”.

Lack of kindergartens in some of the remote rural areas as well as insufficient capacity in urban ones: “*Even though public pre-school education is free, in some rural areas there are no kindergartens at all and, when they exist, in many cases they lack some of the most basic standards in terms of infrastructure, equipment and didactic and play materials*”, emphasized a civil society expert during the FG discussion. In urban areas, the conditions are comparatively better even though with insufficient capacity.

Overcrowded urban schools:

Due to internal migration, there is overcrowding in some urban schools, which makes it impossible for teachers to address each student’s needs and meet all the new competency-based curriculum requirements, therefore, hidden dropout is inevitable. *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education in Albania, 2020, referring to UNESCO 2017, describes that “in rural areas, there are about 17 students per class in public basic education compared to about 21 students per class on average across all Albanian basic education public schools.” However, “about 27% of classrooms in Albania had over 30 students in 2015-2016”.*(OECD, 2020, 56) and “*...some teachers reported class sizes of over 40 students, beyond the legal limit*”. (OECD, 2020, 56).

Students studying in overcrowded classrooms report that it is difficult for teachers to manage the lesson hour, and for some of the students to follow it. In addition, overcrowded classes affect the way in which a teacher organizes the lesson hour or the time spent with students., whereas “*students who study in classes with over 36 students have three times fewer chances to express their opinion in the class.*” (OSFA. 2015)²⁹.

Low level of parents’ involvement and School-Family-Community cooperation: “*School-family-community partnership is very*

29 OSFA, Komuniteteshkolloredhepolitikatarsimore, 2015, p. 14 http://www.osfa.al/sites/default/files/komunitetet_shkollore_dhe_politikat_arsimore.pdf



important for our schools, but parent involvement and cooperation with the community is still a challenge, especially with regard to supporting children with low SES”, stated a school teacher who was supported by other school practitioners. This is related to a low level of awareness among parents on the importance of their active involvement to their children’s interest in school, attainment and achievement, as well as improvement of school programs and the whole school life. Emigration of some of the parents, especially fathers, to other neighboring countries, makes it difficult for mothers to get involved due to numerous family responsibilities. Some other parents feel they do not have the capacity to communicate with teachers and help their children at home due to lack or low level of education, whereas some others are held back from previous school negative experiences. In addition, an OSFA study (2015) found out that another reason affecting low participation of parents in school is related to the lack of information about the school structures, such as: Parent Council and School Board and their role and rights. They generally see school structures as not independent and decision making as an exclusive right or duty of school directors or classroom teachers³⁰.

On the other hand, teachers and schools in general are not yet well prepared for encouraging an active and meaningful involvement of parents. They are not aware of effective methods of parent involvement while the school lacks strategic plans of cooperation with families and the community.

Lately, due to improvement of national legislation and policies, and participation in national or international projects, there are considerable improvements in terms of awareness raising, strengthening of parent representative structures and parents’ involvement and role. However, a better teacher preparation and a more collaborative leadership and participatory approach is essential, as well as a comprehensive School-Family-Community Partnership Program as an integral part of the overall School Development Program.

Lack of proper teacher training to promote multiculturalism and respect for diversity in the schools with diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds of students: Due to improvement of legislation and policies, new school and national initiatives, as

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30 Ibid



well as certain national and international projects aiming at a better quality and more inclusive education, various capacity building opportunities have been provided with a positive impact on the school culture, policies and practices. However, more comprehensive, need-based, pre- and in-service trainings are needed, associated with mentoring and support through national programs, in order to bring about systemic long lasting improvement toward equity. *“We have teachers who do not possess the knowledge and qualification or the right approach to deal with students from different cultural backgrounds. In several cases this de-motivates or even makes students lose interest in learning and in school in general, and even drop out”*, stressed a civil society NGO representative. Therefore, more training and professional development is needed in order to foster respect for cultural diversity and create inclusive classroom and school environments”.

Additionally, *“...low levels of education spending (far from 2020 target of public spending of 3% for Pre-University Education (PUE) and 5% for Education) raise issues of access inclusiveness and efficiency levels of education”* (UNICEF, 2019)³¹.



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31 UNICEF,(2019) *Appraisal of Pre-University Education Strategy* <https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2031/file/Education%20Sector%20Appraisal%20Document%20Eng.pdf>

3. Description of the existing policy measures aimed at reducing inequity

Education

Various policy measures have been undertaken during the last two decades in the framework of national reforms aiming at a better quality, and more inclusive and equitable education. Based on the Law on Pre-University Education No.69/2012³² with amendments, developed on principles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the Pre-University Education Strategy (2016–2020), introduction and development of a competency-based curriculum with a new, formative assessment framework is a significant step forward toward providing better opportunities for the progress and success of all children. The new competency-based curriculum and current educational goals require a total transformation from a teacher-centered to a child-centered teaching and learning approach that gives more space and opportunities to students and is centered to the belief that each student can succeed if they are given the needed support. This is accompanied by the new evaluation framework, which assesses student progress and makes possible identification of their needs, helping teachers adjust teaching and learning programs and providing better support to all students, especially students from lower SES.

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32 Law on Pre-University Education system in the Republic of Albania 69/12 with amendments 56/2015 and 48/2018, <https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Pligj-parauniversitari-i-azhornuar.pdf>



In addition to the development of a competency-based curriculum framework, teacher standards and a school evaluation indicator framework have been introduced. Albania has recently restructured key agencies responsible for school support and external evaluation, in an effort to further deconcentrate central functions and improve service delivery. However, opportunity and outcome related disparities continue across population groups (OECD, 2020)³³

Albania has also made important efforts to improve teaching quality, including updating teaching and teacher professional development standards, raising entry requirements and working toward the standardisation of curriculum content for certain Initial Teacher Education programs, implementing a state exam for new entrants to the teaching profession, and establishing Professional Learning Networks (PLN) (OECD 2020)³⁴. PLNs, according to the guidelines developed by Institute for Education Development, are established by Regional Education Directorates or Local Education Offices (RED/LEO) in the geographical area that they cover aiming at the professional development of the educational employees through: Information and consultation regarding innovations and developments in the field of reforms in Pre-university education; Training of network members on topics related to their needs; Exchange of positive and successful experiences among network members on topics of their everyday work³⁵, even though not yet focused on issues of supporting low SES students. “Training organized by Teacher Professional Networks are organized based on the needs of especially new teachers and they are mainly focused on scientific content”, stated a school practitioner. Even though these trainings support everyday teaching, teachers require more professional development when it comes to advanced interactive and inclusive teaching methods, effective ways of supporting low SES students and improving cooperation with parents. Yet, more ef-

33 OECD, Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Albania, 2020 p.12 <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/d267dc93-en.pdf?expires=1604851694&id=id&ac-cname=guest&checksum=C720DDFCA926E6CDFECBFB2E7E1F6AD3>

34 Ibid

35 Udhëzuespërfunksionimin e rrjeteve profesionale të pynonjësve arsimorë pranë çdo DAR-idhe ZA-je; <http://www.portalishkollor.al/institucion/per-funksionimin-e-rrjeteve-profesionale-te-punonjesve-arsimore-prane-cdo-dar-i-dhe-za-je>

forts and investments are needed as, among others, there are still “concerns about the quality of teachers, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas” (OECD, 2020)³⁶.

Other important public policy measures include: assignment of assistant teachers for students with special needs in schools and provision of individual attention through Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and multi-disciplinary support; provision of psycho-social service at school and local education office level, and provision of free textbooks to children from marginalized groups, including Roma and Egyptian communities, families with social assistance, children with special needs, and so on, at all levels of pre-university education and to all children from 1st to 7th grade. In addition, transportation is covered for certain categories of students, which is determined through decision of Council of Ministers, whereas free meals are not provided in school, as this is not offered as a service at all.

Economic Aid is one of the main indicators that help schools identify students from low SES families that need additional support in addition to multi-disciplinary commission disability evaluation reports at Local Education Offices. Whereas students with learning difficulties are identified by classroom and subject teachers as well as by the psycho-social service in school.

Social protection programs in Albania are mainly focused on cash transfers for poverty alleviation and disability benefits. The NE (NdihmaEkonomike/Economic Aid) program is allocated by household and the maximum size of benefit per household is about 8,000 ALL, calculated at a maximum of 3200 ALL per parent and only 700 ALL per child in the household, which needs to be increased in order to cover some of their most basic needs.

NE program supports about 20% of the families with children under 18 years, or 85 thousand children out of the 144 thousand children living in poor families.³⁷

36 OECD, Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Albania, 2020 p.56 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/d267dc93-en.pdf?expires=1604851694&id=id&ac_cname=guest&checksum=C720DDFCA926E6CDFEFCBFB2E7E1F6AD3

37 End Term Review of Budget Allocations and Spending for the National Action Plan and Child Protection Policies, 2015, p. 60 https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15352/pdf/endterm_review_of_allocations_and_spending_for_npa_and_cp_policies.pdf





Establishment of ROMALB system in 2016 with initial data from Roma and Egyptian children/students is a significant step forward, even though it requires systematic data collection and updating. In addition, the agreement of three central institutions: Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health and Social Protection and Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth in 2008 on the establishment of a joint mechanism for “the identification and registration of school-age children is another important measure toward improvement of school access. Observatory for the Protection of Children’s Rights emphasizes that all the local structures have been introduced to this practice and providers of services in the field of health, education, social services and Child Protection Units in four municipalities of Albania have received support for the implementation of the new instruction in addition to an awareness raising campaign on informing parents of students from marginalized groups about the school enrollment/registration.

Significant advancement has been made in the legal and policy framework toward equity in education for minorities, with a special emphasis on the language of instruction. More specifically, the Albanian Constitution guarantees equal rights and equality before the law for all national minorities. The Law on the Protection of National Minorities³⁸ recognizes as national minorities in the Republic of Albania the Greek, Macedonian, Aromanian, Roma, Egyptian, Montenegrin, Bosnian, Serbian and Bulgarian minorities, which, according to the disputed 2011 Census³⁹, comprise about 1.11% percent of the total population even though it should be stated that 12.69% of the population did not declare their ethnic and cultural identity. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, ratified⁴⁰ by Albania, serves as the foundation for the protection of the rights of minorities, including the right to have basic education in their languages.

While the national official language of instruction in Albania is Albanian, Article 11 (point 2) of this particular Law states that persons belonging to national minorities in the local self-government units where they reside traditionally or are represented through a

38 LIGJ Nr. 96/2017 PËR MBROJTJEN E PAKICAVE KOMBËTARE NË REPUBLIKËN E SHQIPËRISË. <https://www.kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/1524738824-Ligji-Per-Mbrojtjen-e-Pakicave-Kombetare-ne-R.Sh-2017.pdf>

39 INSTAT, Population and Housing, Census, 2011, p. 39, http://www.instat.gov.al/media/3069/11_tirane.pdf

40 Ratified with Law No.8496 on 3.06.1999, applied since 01.01 2000`

substantial number, when there is a sufficient demand, are provided with opportunities to learn or receive instruction in the minority language, in accordance with the related legislation in the field of education.

Regarding the Greek minority, in 2017 there were reported 42 classes instructed in Greek language in the districts of Delvina, Gjirokastra and Saranda and the students studying in public schools are provided with free textbooks⁴¹ based on mutual agreement between the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Greece.

Macedonian minority has had 19 classes in three villages with higher density of Macedonian Minority in the Regional Education Directorate of Korça, (Liqenas, Gorica e Madhe and Gorica e Vogël).

In addition, while significant efforts have been made to improve the general and the educational situation for Roma children during the last years, it is still challenging to have classes instructed in Roma language in schools with bigger concentration of Roma children. Establishment of a Department of Roma Language Teaching⁴² at the University of Elbasan City⁴³ is a significant step forward, even though the number of students is low and the professional development of the professors of Romani language is still considered an urgency.

Official recognition, on the other hand, of the Signs Albanian Language in 2014 is another step forward toward inclusion and equity in education referring to students who cannot hear.

These policy measures and initiatives have improved access to education and raised students' learning outcomes, as shown by the results of PISA 2018 compared to previous ones. *However, educational attainment and performance continue to be strongly influenced by students' background characteristics. Equity is still a concern, with continued disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes according to ethnic background and geographical region, what limits the employment and life chances of many individuals and negatively affects national development* (OECD 2020).

41 Council of Europe, *Language Education Policy Profile*, 2017, p.12 <https://rm.coe.int/language-education-policy-profile-albania/168073cf89>

42 Avery, H., and I. Hoxhallari, *From Policy to Practice: Roma Education in Albania and Sweden, 2017*, p. 9. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11256-016-0394-5>

43 Since the academic year: 2015-2016



Health system

There are several key strategic national documents aiming at better health and overall well-being. The Law No. 10 138/2009 on Public Health⁴⁴ as stated in Article 1, aims *at the protection of health and promotion of healthy living of the population in the Republic of Albania through organized activities whose impact is equally distributed to all groups of the society.*

The National Strategy for Development and Integration 2014-2020 emphasizes in point 3.3.2. that *the “Policies in the health sector seek to ensure equitable access to health services and better service delivery quality...”*⁴⁵ It also states that the aim for improving the health sector over the NSDI II period is to improve access for all the citizens, including all individuals under 18 to a well-defined package of primary and secondary health care services and to ensure that Albanians are able to access tertiary care when required.

There is advancement in the vaccination/immunization sector, as the public health care service covers the immunization program for all children of all ages in Albania. The vaccination service is provided through the primary healthcare service and it is offered free of charge to all children⁴⁶. Moreover, Primary Healthcare is considered as the most relevant program for children, which covers primary healthcare facilities around the country and the service of the family doctor. *Immunization coverage for children at over 97% is considered nearly universal.*⁴⁷

Article 25 of The Law, emphasizes that *“Beneficiaries of services of social protection benefit public services such as health and education and their cost is covered by the State Budget”*⁴⁸.

44 Law No.10 138, date 11.5.2009 on Public Health, <http://www.ishp.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2015/ligjet/Ligji-i-shendetit-publik.pdf>

45 The National Strategy for Development and Integration 2014-2020, point 3.3.2. https://shtetiweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/NSDI_2014-2020_version_JUne-2013.pdf

46 End Term Review of Budget Allocations and Spending for the National Action Plan and Child Protection Policies https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15352/pdf/endterm_review_of_allocations_and_spending_for_npa_and_cp_policies.pdf

47 Retrieved from the website of UNICEF Albania. <https://www.unicef.org/albania/health>

48 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a84406b4.html>



In addition, Law 121/2016 on Social Care Services addresses equity in health treatment for all its beneficiaries in order to ensure well-being, independence and social inclusion of individuals and families and children of low SES and in need of social care⁴⁹.

However, more efforts are needed to successfully implement policies into practice. UNICEF Albania stresses that “*disparities and inequalities persist among children living in poor families, rural and remote areas, and in Roma communities*”⁵⁰ due to limited expertise, resources and sufficient resource-allocation especially affecting Maternal Newborn and Child Health Care.

Social care and welfare

The Legal and Policy framework of the social care system in Albania is composed of comprehensive documents, as follows:

- ▶ The Social Protection Strategy 2015-2020 (SPS), which serves as a set of protection policies and mechanisms for all those excluded or in need of protection through programs of: i) Cash Assistance Scheme; ii) supporting people with disabilities, and iii) integrated social care services at the newly established Local Government Units⁵¹
- ▶ The Law 139/2015 “On Local Self-Government”, which gives municipalities responsibilities to establish and manage local social care services, centers and housing; and establish a “social fund”, in cooperation with the Ministry in charge of social affairs.
- ▶ The Law No. 18/2017, “On the Rights and Protection of the Child”, which strengthens child protection through establishment of Units for Protection of Children’s Rights and also defines legal obligations for institutional coordination and cooperation at the central and local level (including in line ministries, municipalities, child protection units, schools,

49 *Law no. 121/2016 on Social Care Services in the Republic of Albania* <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a84406b4.html>

50 Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/albania/health>

51 UN Project Proposal, “Leave No One Behind” – Project Document, p. 10 <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/Project%20documents/project%20leave%20no%20one%20behind.pdf>



police and so on). It also encouraged the establishment of the National Council for Protection of Children's Rights (NCP-CR) and an advisory body to the Council of Ministers.

Analyzing them, Social Protection programs, focused on cash transfers for poverty alleviation and disability benefits, target the household and not children directly. The maximum size of Economic Aid (EA/NE) per household is about 8,000 ALL, and only 700 ALL per child, which is considered ineffective, as children tend to have higher needs for quality nutrition, care and education than adults⁵².

Schools have a psychologist or a social worker, or both, as part of the multidisciplinary support team and marginalized students are provided with free textbooks at all pre-university education levels in addition to provision of all students from 1st to 7th grade. However, referring to additional services provided in school in order to support low SES students, public schools do not provide food or hot meals to any of the students, including those most in need, except for national vocational schools with dormitories, where food and accommodation expenses of children with low SES are covered by state.⁵³



52 *End Term Review of Budget Allocations and Spending for the National Action Plan and Child Protection Policies, 2015*, p. 60. https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15352/pdf/endterm_review_of_allocations_and_spending_for_npa_and_cp_policies.pdf

53 Decision No. 666 of 10.10.2019, on the Quotes and Financing of Food and Dormitories and on the defining of the criteria for the scholarships and payments for the students of Pre-University Education.

4. Recent changes in last years that affected equity in education

Short summary of main reform initiatives that help promote equity or may put equity in question

Some of the main reform initiatives of the last years, which have had their positive impact on equity, are related to the new competency-based curricula accompanied by a new assessment framework mainly focused on formative assessment that provide better opportunities for students' continuous development and appraisal.

More specifically, the three types of assessments based on the new curricula, especially the continuous assessment and assessment of the student's portfolio, help teachers monitor and assess students' progress, identify their needs for further support and adjust teaching materials and methods accordingly⁵⁴ by ensuring development of all students' competencies and their overall success.

In addition, updating of teacher standards, raising entry requirements for Teacher Education Departments (through Council of Ministers' decision No. 436, dated 03.06.202 on minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) 7.5 and 8 respectively for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 onwards) to attract better quality teacher candidates, working toward standardization of the curriculum content for certain initial teacher education programs, and application of a state entrance exam to the teaching profession, as well as establishment of professional

54 Students assessment in Lower Secondary and Upper secondary education, Tirana, 12.09.2019 – Agency of Assurance of quality of Pre-university education (Instructive material/Guidelines to assist schools) <https://www.ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Materiali-shpjegues-per-vleresimin-e-nxenesit-1.pdf>





learning networks are new initiatives aiming at the improvement of teaching quality, hence better teaching and learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their background. However, various challenges have been faced during the implementation process and *there are still concerns about the quality of teachers, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas* (OECD, 2020)⁵⁵

The Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities (2016-2020) and the Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians (2015-2020) are important reform elements accompanied by additional practical initiatives, including establishment of multi-disciplinary commissions in each education office, appointment and increased number of assistant teachers in the schools where there are children with special needs, and increased number of psycho-social service employees in schools to offer additional support to various marginalized groups, pedagogical staff and parents as well.

Furthermore, establishment of an identification mechanism of out-of school children and enforcement of their registration, as well as provision of free textbooks to children from marginalized groups at all levels of pre-university education and to all children from 1st to 7th grade are positive initiatives aiming at reducing inequality with obvious results.

However, equity remains a real challenge that requires a more strategic investment in the successful implementation of current policies and initiatives toward quality educational opportunities for all children through enhancement of financial resources and human capacity, improvement of institutional inter-sectoral cooperation, strengthening of coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

How are reforms seen by different stakeholders (public officials, CSOs and participants in the education process)?

There is a general perception that Albania has some of the best laws and policy documents that are “*comparable to EU and other developed countries*”, but there are real concerns about their implementation in practice.

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 55 OECD, Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Albania, 2020 <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/d267dc93-en.pdf?expires=1604851694&id=id&ac-name=guest&checksum=C720DDFCA926E6CDFEFCBFB2E7E1F6AD3>

In general, there is a positive attitude toward the new reform initiatives regarding the competency-based curricula, efforts toward improvement of teaching quality through development of new teacher standards, entrance exams, and teacher education department enrolment requirements, as well as efforts toward provision of multi-disciplinary support to children with special needs, strengthening of psycho-social service in schools, as well as provision of additional support through provision of free textbooks to all students from 1st to 7th grade and to all grades for students from marginalized groups.

However, there are concerns, suggestions and recommendations for their successful implementation and sustainable improvement. For instance, more teacher training is needed on student-centered methodology, as well as better instructional conditions and stronger parent involvement and cooperation with the community for successfully implementing the competency-based curricula and ensuring higher student achievement. In addition, pedagogical staff and school leadership need to be better prepared for a multicultural and diverse student community, including minorities, low SES students, students with special needs, and so on. Moreover, more investment is needed for better preparation of assistant teachers and improvement of school physical infrastructure that facilitate access, regular attendance and progress of students with special needs. Furthermore, higher investment is needed for the improvement of physical conditions in rural schools as well as favorable policies that may increase motivation of qualified teachers working in these and other disadvantaged schools.



5. Key conclusions and recommendations

Synthesis – key conclusions and recommendations on how national pro-poor policies can be improved and which are effective and should be promoted as good practice

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Aiming to improve the curriculum and align national policies with European and global goals, Education System in Albania has undergone important reforms, including decentralization of school governance, development of a competency-based curriculum framework and of higher teacher and school leadership standards, which have contributed to improvement of several key education indicators. Access to compulsory education has been increased and student performance and learning outcomes have been improved during the last years, as shown by latest PISA results, even though learning levels remain low compared to other European countries. It has been widely emphasized that educational performance is highly influenced by students' background characteristics. Roma children, children with disabilities and children in rural and remote communities are not yet attaining the quality education entitled by law and there is still a high drop-out rate. Addressing these challenges is essential to Albania's educational and economic development and its efforts toward joining the European Union.

In addition to various initiatives aiming at improving teaching quality and equity, increasing teacher standards and establishment of a new teacher career development, appraisal and rewarding system, based on continuous development of advanced teacher competencies, aligned with new standard requirements, are crucial.

Furthermore, increased investment in the education sector is vital to the successful implementation of national policies and reforms for sustainable development and improvement. Specific attention to the successful implementation of competency-based curricula is needed through special emphasis on the development of a child-centered teaching methodology that requires better teacher preparation and continuous need-based professional development in order to address the requirements of the new teaching standards, accompanied by improved school and instructional facilities, and a more competency-based appraisal and rewarding system.

Furthermore, high investment is needed in:

- ▶ The successful implementation of national policies and reforms aiming at a quality, equitable and inclusive education for all children;
- ▶ The development of long-term policy measures and interventions for quality education opportunities in rural areas through: improvement of school physical conditions, motivation of qualified teachers and continuous professional development, strengthening of school governance, cooperation with parents and the community, and development of inclusive extra-curricular activities for all children irrespective of their background;
- ▶ Reducing overcrowding in public schools in urban areas and increasing educational access and quality for students from marginalized and disadvantaged groups;
- ▶ Strengthening collaborative school leadership and inner school structures, and cooperation with parents and other stakeholders in order to support development of an inclusive learning community for all students;
- ▶ Increasing the capacity of teachers and school leaders to understand and promote respect for cultural diversity and develop a welcoming multicultural school environment with well-established mechanisms that fight discrimination and exclusion;
- ▶ Strengthening the multi-disciplinary and advanced psycho-social service support system at school and local level through inter-sectoral commitment and cooperation,



continuous professional capacity building opportunities and improved school facilities;

- ▶ Increasing financial, social and material support to all low SES students and their families, while continuing provision with free textbooks and other necessary school materials, as well as free transportation throughout the year, so that the challenge of meeting basic needs does not impede their school attainment and success;
- ▶ Improving the financial capacity of schools and providing continuous mentoring and support in order to ensure a successful implementation of comprehensive School Development Programs, and other inclusive policies and practices tailored to the needs of their diverse student community, especially their marginalized groups.



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